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ABSTRACT

In order to understand how power affects other relationships, to offer an exploratory methodology for operationalizing an intervention typology, and to eventually develop a theoretical model that predicts affective influence on third party intervention modes in given conflict situations, a pilot study hypothesized that the frequency of preferred intervention style will vary from a theoretical distribution for three different positional power situations (one-up, one-down, one-across). Subjects, 19 undergraduates enrolled in a Small Groups Communication Course at Bowling Green State University (Ohio), discussed the meaning of the word "organization" and third party intervention and then were tested to determine how they would react in situations that required them to take some kind of positional power. Findings showed that (1) when respondents were placed into a hypothetical one-down position in conflict, they opted for a more powerful intervention style; (2) when placed into a one-across conflict situation, respondents preferred third parties with limited power for forcing agreement; and (3) weak intervention styles such as conciliation were not highly preferred by respondents. (Two tables of data are included, and 18 references and an appendix containing the test instrument are attached.) (MS)

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Perspective-Taking, Position Power, and Third Party Intervention Style: A Classroom Application

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Running head: Third Party Intervention Styles

Presented at the Michigan Association of Speech Communication Convention, October 1, 1988, Flint, MI

Abstract

This project constitutes a social science pilot study to be implemented in secondary and college level courses that cover conflict in human communication. Six types of third party intervention previously developed by Simpkin (1971) and Campion (1983) are explained. The concept of position power is also defined and reviewed. A paper and pencil instrument for operationalizing Simpkin's typology was developed and pilot tested. Results of the study are presented. When respondents were placed into a hypothetical one-down position in conflict, they opted for a more powerful intervention style. When placed into a one-across conflict situation, respondents preferred third parties with limited power for forcing agreement. Weak intervention styles were not highly preferred by respondents. Specific findings and implications are discussed. Tools for incorporating the experience are located in the Appendix.

Perspective-Taking, Position Power, and

Third Party Intervention:

A Classroom Application

Conflict in human communication has clearly been a heuristic standout for researchers in the social sciences. The topic frequents numerous communication courses and textbooks in service (e.g., DeVito, 1987; Jones, Barnlund, & Haiman, 1980; Knapp, 1984). Textbooks in organizational communication commonly address conflict in the form of organizational climate (e.g., Daniels & Spiker, 1987; Goldhaber, 1983; McPhee & Tompkins, 1985).

This project will readily fit into numerous courses at secondary and college levels. Briefly, the project has been presented in the traditional quantitative social science format. After reading the manuscript, an instructor should be able to conduct the pilot study in the classroom.

Six types of third party intervention are discussed in the next section. Then position power is presented. The pilot study proposes a relationship between position power and preferred third party intervention styles in given conflict situations. Results from a pilot study are then presented and discussed.

Conflict Intervention

Campion (1983) examined six roles of conflict mediation previously developed by Simpkin (1971). The roles are primarily differentiated on the intervener's capacity to force an agreement between two conflicting parties. Agreements do not necessarily produce mutual satisfaction. The roles are defined below. They are presented hierarchically from least powerful to most powerful. Here, power refers to the role's capacity rather than the rhetorical skills of the intervener.

First, in "conciliation" the third party serves as a facilitator and/or channel between parties in conflict. The conciliator may act as an interpreter who translates a message for two parties. One form of conciliatory influence comes in the form of emphasizing or deemphasizing parts of messages. Agenda setting may also be under the control of the conciliator.

Second, in "mediation" the third party facilitates and makes suggestions or recommendations for the two parties in conflict. The primary difference between mediation and conciliation lies in the power of suggestion. Mediators can suggest alternative ideas for agreement or endorse an existing solution. For instance, a student grieves a grade given by a teacher and a dean serves as the mediator. The dean could

suggest that the student drop the grievance or suggest that the teacher raise the student's grade. Alternatively, the dean might suggest that the student write a book report for a better grade.

Third, a "fact finder" is able to present independent information to the conflicting parties. However, this intervener cannot make any recommendations for the two parties. A fact finder's primary asset comes in the form of unknown information. For example, two friends begin to haggle over the price of a used automobile. They might decide to visit a used car dealership and get an appraisal.

Fourth, in "fact finding" the third party brings in information not known to either party in addition to facilitating communication. This type of intervener can make recommendations for the two parties in conflict. The capacity to make recommendations differentiates "fact finding" from a "fact finder."

Fifth, in "voluntary arbitration" both disputants agree to present cares to a third party who then makes a binding recommendation that both parties must adhere to. Free agency in professional baseball employs this type of conflict intervention. Judge Wapner also operates on this level on "The People's Court."

Finally, in "compulsory arbitration" a refusal of one or both parties results in an organizationally granted superior to make a binding agreement between both parties after allowing them to present their cases. For example, a father separates his two boys from fighting, listens to each boy's perceptions, and then prescribes a rule for the boys to live by.

Position Power

Like conflict management, the concept of social power has been a heuristic avenue of research for many social science disciplines. Yet, as Cromwell and Olsen (1975) said, "little collaboration (from all fields) has produced only fragmented knowledge about how power affects various relationships and institutions" (p. XV). Further, Hersey (1983) has noted that there is considerable confusion over the definition of power. For the most part, definitions have made it necessary to differentiate power, authority, and leadership. Yukl (1981) notes that authority is an agent's right to exercise power. Hersey (1983) stated that "leadership is simple any attempt to influence, while power is well described as a leader's influence potential" (p. 177, emphasis his). To be clear, power has been researched as a perceived phenomenon which affects and effects the quality of compliance between two or more individuals.

Certain types of power have been classified and researched in terms of what type is the best to employ. French and Raven's (1959) bases of social power have received considerable attention (e.g., Donnelly, 1970; Marcus, 1968; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980).

Position power is of central concern to the present study. Position power is somewhat analogous to French and Raven's (1959) concept of legitimate power. Specifically, legitimate power is granted by the organization. A manager is granted authority to hire, fire, buy, sell, and so on. The organization grants rights to each position in the organization. Position power can also be viewed from a relational perspective (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Here, power is conceptualized by dominance. There are three possible positions that one can operate from in any relationship. First, in a one-up relationship a command results in compliance. Second, a one-down relationship- is the inverse of a one-up relationship. Watzlawick et al. (1967) would classify this as a complementary relationship. Third, a relationship may operate at a one-across level. An assertion is met with an assertion. A command is greeted by a command. Watzlawick et al. offered the term symmetry to characterize relationships demonstrating this type of interactional pattern.

The link between position power and legitimate power become clear here. An organization may legitimize the type of relationship (one-up, one-down, or one-across). Putting someone in charge of someone else creates an environment that is conducive to a complementary type of relationship. Similarly, telling two people that they are coworkers fosters a symmetrical relationship.

One distinction needs to be clear. Making someone a manager over a group of employees does not make each relationship complementary. As an educational consultant, I have repeatedly witnessed children act in a one-up position or one-across position to their parents. Recently, after being brought in for testing, one thirteen-year-old boy demanded that his mother return with a Slurpee. Later, when scheduling an appointment, the mother conceded to the son's demand for 10 a.m. In short, reality can be somewhat different from role expectations.

Method

Overview

The social scientific value of the present project can be summarized in three points. First, it further addresses Cromwell and Olsen's (1975) call for understanding how power affects other relationships. Second, it offers an exploratory

methodology for operationalizing Simpkin's intervention typology. And Third, the present pilot study may eventually develop into a theoretical model that predicts affective influence on third party invention modes in given conflict situations. Henceforth, I offer the following exploratory research hypothesis: The frequency of preferred intervention style will vary from a theoretical distribution for three different positional power situations (one-up, one-down, one-across).

The pedagogical values for conducting this pilot study in the classroom are numerous. First, it gives the student an experience in resolving conflict from the role of a third party. Second, it represents an exercise in perspective-taking. Third, the student comprehends two bodies of contemporary organizational theory. And fourth, the student gets exposure to theory building in social science.

Sample

This experience could be of functional value to classrooms of all sizes. Large groups may need to use discussion facilitators for debriefing. Participants for this investigation included 19 undergraduate students enrolled in a Small Groups Communication course at Bowling Green State

University. The class was composed of 6 males and 13 females. Ages ranged from 18 - 40 years.

Procedure

At the beginning of a regular class session, students were told that they would be covering the concept of third party intervention. Accordingly, the meaning of the word organization and third party intervention were discussed. Essentially, the main points drawn out of the discussion were that organizations enjoy a large range of contextual situations (e.g., family, union, management). Likewise, the notion that third party intervention could occur in many different situations was made as well.

Next, Simpkin's (1971) six types of third party intervention were presented. In brief, students were able to ask questions on the styles and were shown how the power granted to the intervener varied across styles (increasing from conciliation to compulsory arbitration). Position power should not be discussed until after participants have completed the questionnaire. This is designed to prevent confoundment.

After the discussion on intervention styles, the instrument was administered to the students. They were asked to answer every situation with the style of intervention that they preferred most. Students then returned the anonymous

instrument and were put into groups in order to discuss the questionnaire. Each group recorded notes on their discussion and handed them in as well. The contents of these notes are summarized in the Discussion section of this paper. All groups answered the following questions:

1. Are the situations realistic enough? How could they be improved?
2. Are the situations descriptive enough? How could they be improved?
3. Are the intervention styles descriptive enough? How could they be improved?
4. What was the most difficult thing about the questionnaire?
5. What did you like most about the questionnaire?
6. Can you think of analogous situations?

After the data was collected, the class was debriefed. All questions were answered, and the participants were thanked for their efforts.

Instrument

Essentially, the instrument is composed of three sections. First, the instructions state that each of the following situations place the participant into the role of a person involved in a conflictual relationship. The participant was to

assume that third party intervention was the only alternative available. Last, based on their position in the relationship, participants are asked to select the intervention style that they would most prefer. Intervention choices are listed in the second section of the instrument.

The third section of the instrument is composed of six different situations. The situations alter the role of the participant in terms of positional power. From a legitimate perspective, the participant is one-down in situations one and four, one-across in situations two and five, and one-up in situations three and six. Below, the situations are listed just as they were presented on the scale:

1. As a student, you have worked very hard in a class. And, the way you figured it, you should have received an "A" for the course grade. However, your professor has given you a "C" and refuses to raise your grade. Even though you have talked with your professor, the grade has no chance of being raised unless you file a grievance with the university. What intervention style would you prefer most in this situation?
2. You and a fellow student have been assigned a major class project worth 30% of each of your course grades. It has been three weeks now and your partner refuses

to have any meetings outside of class. In addition, they have not finished most of the tasks that they had agreed to complete by now. If you do not act soon, the project looks sure to fail. What style of intervention do you prefer most?

3. You have been hired as a summer supervisor for a local firm. Recently, one of the workers has been failing to do the jobs that you ask them to do. Further, they will not reason with why; they only say that you give them more work than others. Since you are a summer supervisor, you do not have the authority to fire a worker; however, you can ask for a form of intervention. Which style would you prefer most?
4. You have been working at a company on a part-time basis for a year. Last week, you asked your manager for a raise. The manager refused to give you one but admitted that your work has been deserving. No further reason or excuse was given. Which intervention style would you prefer most?
5. Currently, you live in a residence hall at college. It is in the middle of the winter semester. You and your roommate have had difficulty in the past, but now the situation is desperate. The personality clash is

getting in the way of school work and mutual friendships. Which style of intervention would you prefer most?

6. You are a residence hall assistant (RA) for the university. For about six weeks now, one of the residents has been breaking several minor rules, usually on your weekend shifts. You have talked with the residents, but they refuse to cooperate. Which style of intervention do you prefer most?

Results

A chi-square was implemented in order to compare the frequency of preferred intervention choices across three distributions (positional power levels). Due to the sample size, matrice cells were collapsed in order to reduce the chance of error. Thus, a 3 x 5 matrice combined the positional situations (one-up, one-down, and one-across) and two columns (conciliation and fact finder), or intervention preferences, in order to make the expected frequencies be above accepted levels. This procedure, according to Harshbarger (1971), is appropriate for pilot studies with limited sample sizes (p. 213). Chi-square, then, was significant (^{2} = 56.55) at the $p < .005$ level (critical value = 21.95, df = 8). See Table 1 for an illustration. In the one-up situations, fact finding

Table 1

Chi-Square Matrice

Situation	Conciliation Fact Finder	Mediation	Fact Finding	Voluntary Arbitration	Compulsory Arbitration
One-Up	O = 5	O = 7	O = 12	O = 8	O = 6
	E = 3.68	E = 11.03	E = 7.05	E = 7.97	E = 8.27
One-Down	O = 4	O = 4	O = 9	O = 14	O = 17
	E = 4.65	E = 13.93	E = 8.9	E = 10.06	E = 10.45
One-Across	O = 3	O = 25	O = 2	O = 4	O = 4
	E = 3.68	E = 11.03	E = 7.05	E = 7.97	E = 8.27

Note. O = Observed, E = Expected.

and, to a lesser extent, mediation were the largest contributors to the observed and expected differences. Further, in the one-down situation, mediation, compulsory arbitration, and voluntary arbitration demonstrated the largest observed and expected discrepancies in the order listed. Finally, mediation was the largest observed-expected discrepancy for the one-across situations.

Beyond the chi-square analysis, an illustration of the original 6 x 6 matrice is reported in Table 2. This matrice breaks down the preferred intervention styles for each situation. The situations in Table 2 were recorded based on the positional nature of the relationships between hypothetical parties (one-up, one-down, and one-across). Mediation was the most popular choice in both situations II and V (one-across). Fact finding was selected most frequently in situation III (one-up). Voluntary arbitration was preferred the most in situation I (one-down) and in situation VI (one-up).

Discussion

The support of the hypothesis offers some promise for future research. Indeed, the pilot study enjoyed limited success. To be clear, positional power and intervention preference appear to be related. At least as far as the chi-square analysis was concerned, certain styles were preferred

Table 2

Observed Intervention Style Preferences

Situation	Intervention Styles					
	Conciliation	Mediation	Fact Finder	Fact Finding	Voluntary Arbitration	Compulsory Arbitration
I	1	1	0	4	11	2
II	0	15	0	0	1	3
III	1	5	3	9	0	1
IV	1	3	2	5	3	5
V	3	10	0	2	3	1
VI	1	2	0	3	8	5
TOTAL	7	36	5	23	26	17

more frequently than others, depending on the position power in the relationship. Still, further research needs to substantiate the relationship between power and intervention style. Thus, the present discussion is oriented toward the improvement of the instrument. Limitations are also observed. I have incorporated student feedback in this discussion. You may want to tabulate results and promote a discussion to explain class findings. Why are certain styles more popular? Why are other styles less popular?

First, the number of intervention choices appears to be more than adequate. In fact, the need to collapse chi-square cells in the pilot study suggests that there may be too many choices. To be specific, the styles of conciliation and fact finder were least preferred overall. Perhaps the fact finder style should be eliminated from the instrument. That is, mediation or fact finding were very popular choices which differ in power greatly. The fact finder style's power rests between these two methods. In short, the difference between fact finder, mediation, and fact finding may be too subtle. Further research should explore this possibility.

Conciliation was also low in popularity. And, more importantly, conciliation is the intervention style with the least amount of interventionist power. The conciliator is only

concerned with the channels of communication. With this is mind, a researcher has to wonder if conciliation should be removed as one of the choices. Although it seems plausible, we must remember that the elimination of such a style leaves mediation as the least powerful intervention style. Perhaps, then, the conciliation extreme is needed. Again, future research should focus on this concern.

Second, compulsory arbitration and, to a lesser extent, voluntary arbitration were frequently selected when respondents were in the one-down situations. It seems logical that such a selection would help to even out the power discrepancy perceived in the relationship. That is to say, the arbitration process given the interventionist more control than either party in conflict. Thus, from the one-down position, the respondent equalizes his or her position. On the other hand, feedback from some respondents suggested that arbitration was attractive from the one-up position. Here, the reasoning was that they did not foresee having anything to lose.

This type of reasoning suggests two implications. First, perhaps the one-up situations did not accurately describe what was to be gained or lost in the situation. If this is the case, then more one-up situations should be created and tested. Further, the new situations should stress what can be lost in

the situations from the role of the one-up position. If results change, then we have further factors to consider.

Third, we must explain why mediation was such a popular choice for the one-across situations. Perhaps an equalness of positional power is desired. Both parties may not want to risk losing any positional power to an interventionist, such as fact finding or arbitration. Therefore, the mediator can facilitate communication and make suggestions but has no binding positional power. Put differently, neither party stands to lose positional power from mediational intervention.

Finally, some of the feedback reported having minor difficulty with some of the situations. More specifically, one group commented that situation three was awkward. That is, they would have liked to have known who the interventionist would be. Hence, a weakness may be found in the sense that the whom of the intervener needs to be filled in. A solution to this problem may be found by noting that the intervener would be anonymous to both parties and neutral in terms of any disputes. Indeed, a "real life" interventionist needs this quality to be successfully employed.

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Appendix

Instructions

Each of the following situations places you into the role of a person in a conflictual relationship with another party. Assume that third party intervention is the only alternative available to you. Based on your position in the relationship, select the intervention style that you would prefer most.

Intervention Choices

CONCILIATION - the third party serves as a facilitator and/or channel between parties in conflict.

MEDIATION - the third party facilitates and makes suggestions or recommendations for the two parties.

FACT FINDER - the third party independently brings in information not known to either party, in addition to facilitating communication. However, this intervener cannot make any recommendations for the two parties.

FACT FINDING - the third party independently brings in information not known to either party, in addition to facilitating communication. This intervener <u>can</u> make recommendations for the two parties.

VOLUNTARY ARBITRATION - where both disputants agree to present cases to a third party who then makes a binding recommendation that both parties must adhere to.

COMPULSORY ARBITRATION - a refusal of one or both parties results in an organizationally granted superior to make a binding agreement between both parties after allowing them to present their cases.

Situations

1. As a student, you have worked very hard in class. And, the way you figured it, you should have received an "A" for the course grade. However, your professor has given you a "C" and refuses to raise your grade. Even though you have talked with your professor, the grade has no chance of being raised unless you file a grievance with the university. What intervention style would you prefer most in this situation?

   Answer:_____

2. You and a fellow student have been assigned a major class project worth 30% of each of your course grades. It has been three weeks now, and your partner refuses to have any meetings outside of class. In addition, they have not finished most of the tasks that they had agreed to complete by now. If you do not act soon, the project looks sure to fail. What style of intervention do you prefer most?

   Answer:_____

3. You have been hired as a summer supervisor for a local firm. Recently, one of the workers has been failing to do the jobs that you ask them to do. Further, they will not reason with why; they only say that you give them more work than others. Since you are a summer supervisor, you do not have the authority to fire a worker; however, you can ask for a form of intervention. Which style would you prefer most?

   Answer:_____

4. You have been working at a company on a part-time basis for a year. Last week, you asked your manger for a raise. The manager refused to give you one but admitted that your work has been deserving. No further reason or excuse was given. Which intervention style would you prefer most?

   Answer:_____

5. Currently, you live in a residence hall at college. It is in the middle of the winter semester. You and your roommate have had difficulty in the past, but now the situation is desperate. The personality clash is getting in the way of school work and mutual friendships. Which style of intervention would you prefer most?

   Answer:_____

6. You are a resident hall assistant (RA) for the university. For about six weeks now, one of the residents has been breaking several minor rules, usually on your weekend shifts. You have talked with the resident, but they refuse to cooperate. Which intervention style do you prefer most?

Answer:_____